DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
GALVESTON DISTRICT, CORPS OF ENGINEERS
P. O. BOX 1229
GALVESTON, TEXAS 77553-1229

REPLY TO
ATTENTION OF

Planning Section

August 16, 2004

NOTICE OF STUDIES AND INITIAL PUBLIC SCOPING MEETING FOR MATAGORDA SHIP CHANNEL, TEXAS FEASIBILITY STUDY

Introduction

This notice provides a summary of planned Feasibility Study activities for the Matagorda Ship Channel (MSC), Texas, Project and solicits public comment regarding the study. The MSC Project study will analyze and evaluate alternatives to reconfigure the MSC jetties to improve navigation safety, and deepen and widen the ship channel to improve the navigational efficiency and safety of the existing waterway for movement of commerce. An opportunity also exists for environmental restoration through the beneficial use of dredged material.

The Calhoun County Navigation District is the non-Federal sponsor for this project. At the request of the non-Federal sponsor, Congress has directed the Secretary of the Army to conduct this study under the authority of Section 216 of the Flood Control Act of 1970 and a Congressional study resolution adopted September 8, 1988, by the House Committee on Public Works and Transportation.

Study Background

Prior to the opening of the MSC through Matagorda Peninsula and construction of jetties for navigation in the 1960's, shipping transport into the Calhoun County Navigation District was through Pass Cavallo, an area with treacherous currents and shoals.

The MSC (Figure 1) provides deep-draft access from the Gulf of Mexico through the jetties to Matagorda Bay and public port facilities in Calhoun County, including a harbor and turning basin at Port Lavaca/Point Comfort, the northern terminus of the MSC, Port O'Connor and Palacios Harbor.

Since construction of the MSC, increased currents and crosscurrents are causing severe erosion and scouring at the jetties. These conditions pose an immediate danger to the integrity of the jetties and to the shipping industry that must navigate the channel through the jetties. Should the jetties fail, access by vessels to the Gulf of Mexico from Port Lavaca/Point Comfort, Port O'Connor and Palacios Harbor would cease, causing extreme economic hardship to business and ports in those areas.

Additional navigational safety and economic benefits are expected to be derived by deepening the ship channel from its currently authorized depth of 36 feet along its 22-mile length.

Study Process Overview

The general study process involves both a reconnaissance phase and a feasibility phase. The reconnaissance phase determines whether Federal interest exists in pursuing further studies. The MSC reconnaissance study, finalized in March 2004, determined Federal interest. During the feasibility phase, detailed engineering, economic and environmental studies are conducted to identify the best, most cost-effective and environmentally compliant solution to the project problem. The product of the feasibility phase will be a report to the Congress recommending the best solution.

Study Status

The Galveston District initiated the feasibility phase of the study for the MSC on June 15, 2004. The scope of the feasibility study includes screening three (3) alternatives for repairing the MSC jetties (Figure 2), and evaluating deepening and widening the existing ship channel from the entrance to the jetties to Port Lavaca to improve navigational efficiency of the existing waterway for movement of commerce.

The alternatives that will be evaluated in the feasibility phase include:

- Deepening the MSC from the currently authorized 36 foot depth. Various depths between 36 feet and 45 feet will be investigated. Deepening the channel would allow for transit of larger vessels into the ports.

- Widening the MSC from its current approximate 200 foot width to 350 or 400 feet in width to accommodate safety requirements for vessels transporting other cargoes.

- Three alternatives have been developed for jetty improvement as part of the project for navigational improvements and will be evaluated during the feasibility study.

    1. Widening the entrance channel between North and South Jetties. Widening the jetties and channel will reduce the velocity of currents, provide easier navigation for vessel traffic and may reduce scour along the jetty system.

    2. Widening the South Jetty. This alternative will allow littoral movement through the jetty system, causing sediment deposits into the Matagorda Channel, which may increase the frequency of dredging cycles along the channel.

    3. Widening and flanging the North and South Jetties. Flanging both jetties will capture littoral movement on both the east and west sides of Matagorda Bay. This will provide beach nourishment and minimize potential erosion along the existing jetty system. This alternative is expected to improve navigation in the channel and minimize scour.

Purpose of the Public Scoping Meeting

The purpose of the meeting is to inform the community about the proposed study and how the study will be conducted. The public will be provided the opportunity to participate with the Galveston District and the Non-Federal Sponsor, the Calhoun County Navigation District, to identify any environmental concerns or study efforts needed to resolve these concerns, and comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Every effort will be made to address concerns or issues identified during the course of this study. This notice serves as an invitation to the public to attend.

Date:	September 8, 2004
Location:	Rooms 1 and 2, Bauer Community Center, 2300 Highway 35 N, Port Lavaca, TX
Time:	6:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. Open House
	7:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. Public Meeting

During the Open House, representatives for the Sponsor and the Corps will be available to answer questions and provide information.

Specifically, public input is requested concerning:

- Channel-associated modifications that could improve the quality of navigation
- Operational issues associated with the MSC
- Issues associated with current dredged material disposal practices
- Opportunities for the beneficial uses of dredged materials

Interested parties are invited to provide input to this study so that all interests and concerns may be addressed. Please send your comments, questions or mailing list updates to the address shown on the first page of this notice. Written comments will be accepted for 30 days following the meeting, or until October 8, 2004. For additional information, please contact the Environmental Lead, Mr. George Dabney, by telephone at (409) 766-6345 or by e-mail at george.dabney@swg02.usace.army.mil or the Planning Lead, Ms. Joanne Williams, at (409) 766-6337 or by e-mail at Joanne.B.Williams@usace.army.mil.

Steven P. Haustein
Colonel, Corps of Engineers
District Engineer

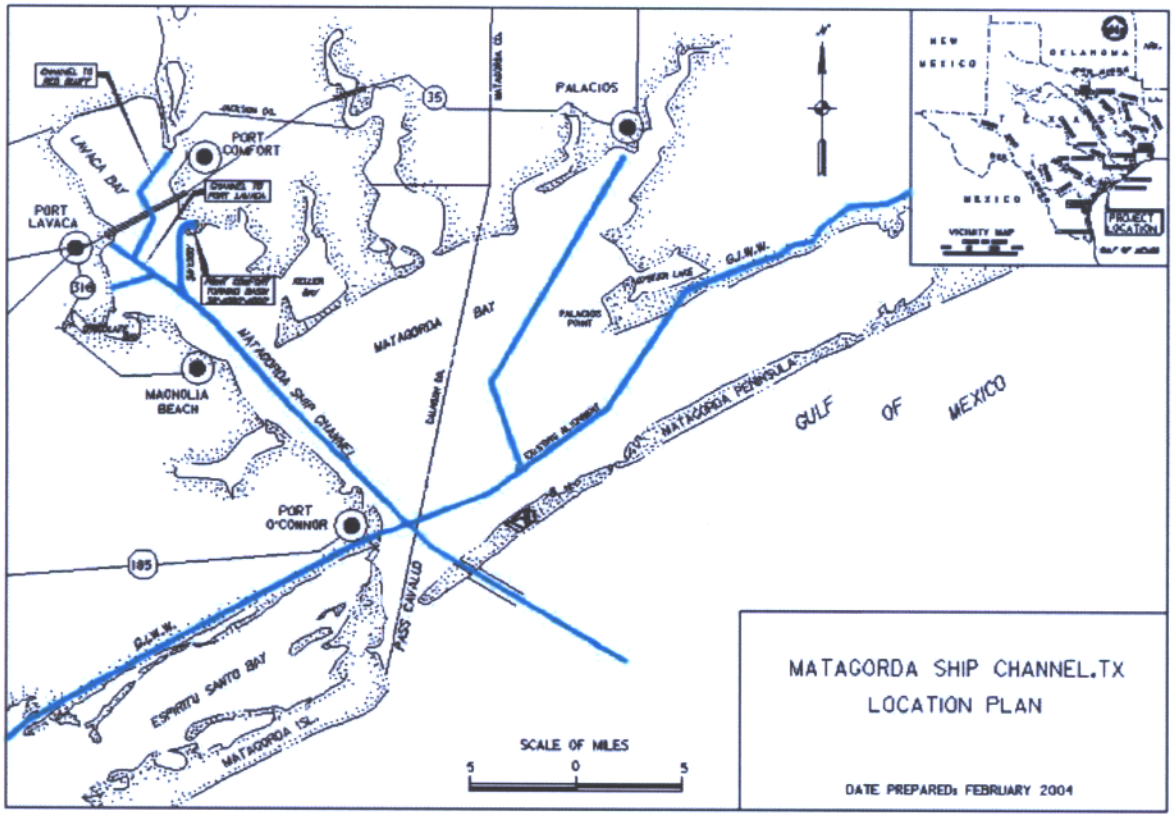

Figure 1
MSC Project Location

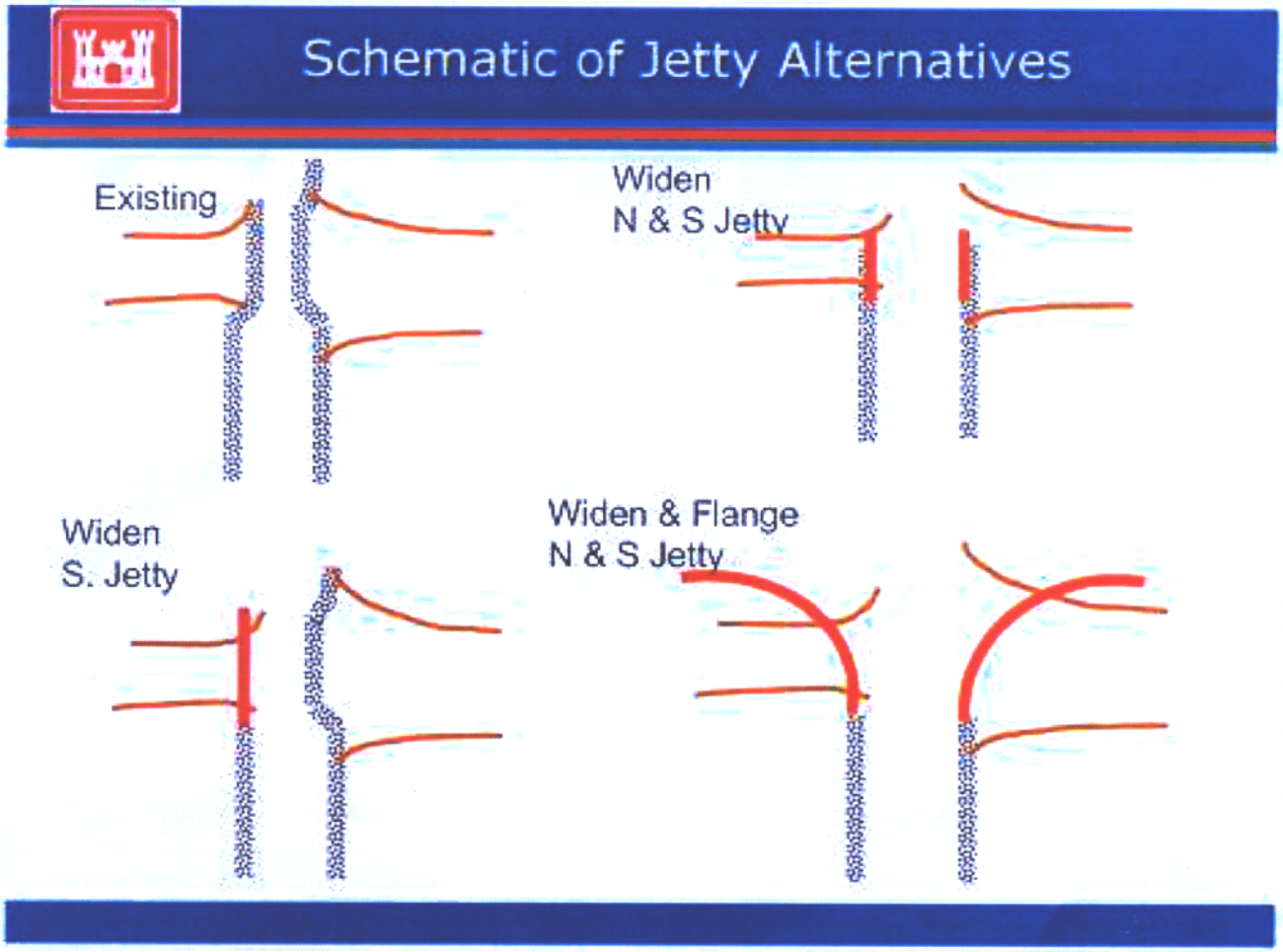

Figure 2
Jetty Repair Alternatives